



OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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**Linda McCulloch
Superintendent**

DATE: October 18, 2004

SUBJECT: Duration of Households' Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility Determination

TO: School Food Authority (SFA) Administrators

FROM: Christine Emerson, Director
School Nutrition Programs

Beginning school year 2004-05, once approved for free or reduced-price school meal benefits households are no longer required to report changes in circumstances that occur during the school year. Formerly, households were required to report an increase in income of \$50 per month (\$600 annually); a decrease in household size; or when the household was no longer certified eligible for food stamps, Families Achieving Independence in Montana (FAIM), or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Households will remain eligible for meal benefits for a maximum of 30 days after the first operating day in the subsequent school year or when a new eligibility determination is made in the subsequent school year, whichever comes first.

This provision does not apply when the initial eligibility determination was incorrect or when verification of household eligibility does not support the level of benefits for which the household was approved. In those instances, officials must make appropriate changes in eligibility. Additionally, this provision does not apply when a household is given temporary approval. School Nutrition Programs continues to encourage determining officials to approve households on a temporary basis when their need for assistance appears to be short-term, such as when the household reports zero income or a temporary reduction in income. A suggested time period for temporary approvals is 45 days. At the end of the temporary approval, school officials must re-evaluate the household's situation.

Please note that households may continue to apply for benefits at any time during the school year.

If you have questions, contact Holly Humphrey, School Nutrition Programs Specialist, (406) 444-4413.